

THE STUDY OF MAN

CHANGING SOCIAL STATUS AND PREJUDICE

The Race Theories of a Pioneering American Sociologist

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IN RECENT years it has been the fashion among American sociologists to belittle or more commonly to ignore the work of the earliest American sociologists, of men like Robert E. Park, Albion Small, C. H. Cooley, Lester F. Ward, and Edward A. Ross. These scholars, many of whom founded the first chairs in sociology at American universities during the first two decades of this century, are often dismissed as simply reporters, reformers, theologians, and philosophers—which is what most of them were, primarily. They began their work at a time when sociology had barely differentiated itself as a study from the more general interest in social problems that has always existed without benefit of a special name or special techniques. And they speculated about man's social life without "going into the field" to undertake empirical studies, using as their data impressionistic and unscientific observations.

The collection and publication of the es-

THE present-day concern of American social science with the study of race, the contacts and conflicts between races, and race prejudice, owes much to the influence of a man who is barely known to the general public, the sociologist Robert E. Park. S. M. LIPSET, assistant professor of sociology at the University of California, here sums up Park's views on race, and considers to what extent social science research has supported his pioneer work. Mr. Lipset holds his bachelor's degree from the City College of New York, his doctorate from Columbia University, and taught at Toronto University before taking up his present post in California. His book, *Agrarian Socialism: A Study of the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation in Saskatchewan*, is to be published shortly by the University of California Press.

says that one of these men, Robert E. Park (1864-1944), wrote over a period of thirty years on race relations and race prejudice,* offers us the opportunity to form a more just view—and makes clear how much we owe to this first generation. Indeed, it becomes apparent that much that we consider peculiarly modern in the understanding of race relations and race prejudice was formulated as long as thirty-seven years ago.

PARK was professor of sociology at the University of Chicago for many years, and his students now hold some of the most important positions in the field. Originally, however, he was a newspaperman and journalist (he wrote the first articles exposing the exploitation of the natives of the Belgian Congo before the First World War), and, as we learn from an interesting autobiographical note printed in this volume, he thought of himself as a reporter even after he had become a sociologist:

"My interest in the newspaper had grown out of the discovery that a reporter who had the facts was a more effective reformer than an editorial writer who merely thundered from his pulpit, no matter how eloquently.

"According to my earliest conception of a sociologist, he was to be a kind of super-reporter, like the men who write for *Fortune*. He was to report a little more accurately, and in a manner a little more detached than the average . . . the 'Big News.' The 'Big News' was the long-term trends which recorded what is actually going on rather than what, on the surface of things, merely seems to be going on."

However, when we look through this volume, which contains Park's reactions to the

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"Big News" in race relations during his lifetime (he writes about Hawaii, the South, Brazil, and the Pacific Coast), we see that he was more than a super-reporter; he was a keen sociological theorist who made use of sociological conceptions to set forth a large number of significant hypotheses about the operations of the society about him. The fact that he himself did not set up elaborate investigations to test these hypotheses by no means justifies underestimating their influence and continuing importance; to evaluate his work we must rather analyze the extent to which his hypotheses and insights have proved fruitful for latter-day research.

THE chief hypotheses on race that underlie his writings, we can see from this volume, form a complete whole. Let us try to crystallize his theory of race as he developed it in these papers.

Trying to explain the diversity in the relations between different races, the total range from peace and accommodation to all-out conflict, Park puts forth as his fundamental hypothesis that race prejudice—and class prejudice too—is created when groups or individuals try to resist a change in social organization. Race relations become strained when changes in status constantly take place. Such changes produce conflicts of interest that find a vent in race hostility. Certain individuals and classes rise and invade the higher levels of societies, and the prestige of other individuals and classes is in consequence threatened or falls. In the United States, where changes in the underlying economic conditions take place more rapidly than elsewhere, there are greater changes in social status, threats to it are more prevalent and intense, and there is consequently greater prejudice. The least active prejudice, on the other hand, exists where economic and status positions are fixed, as in a rigid caste society.

From this initial hypothesis, numerous other hypotheses flow. The race prejudice thus aroused serves to restrict free competition among different ethnic groups by arbitrarily ruling out certain occupations. It may be further hypothesized that, since prejudice comes from rather deeper roots than misunderstanding between groups, it will not be dispelled by further knowledge alone. "We hate people because we fear them; because our interests, as we understand them at any rate, run counter to theirs."

Park further believed that peoples of divergent races and cultures can only live peacefully to-

gether within the limits of the same economy if there is a division of labor among the various groups: that is, if they do not come into economic competition. It will also help maintain the stability of minority groups if they live in comparative moral or cultural isolation, as the Jews did in the Middle Ages.

Since it is in the city that different racial groups meet as competitors for class and status, race conflict is primarily an urban phenomenon. The money economy of the city characteristically facilitates changes in status, and as a result tension develops between those who have status and those who are attempting to secure it. Race relations are also closely linked to the problem of the merchant and trade. The relation between buyer and seller is one which inevitably breeds suspicion since each is attempting to outwit the other; and psychologically one would prefer to have business relations with strangers, or people one could think of as strangers, since sentiment can be then left out. Perhaps for this reason, among many others, traders have since the days of Athens tended to be foreigners; the Metics in Athens, the Chinese in non-Chinese oriental societies, and the Jews in Europe. The alien merchant has usually had low status, and has been resented by the "natives."

In contemporary society, where the low status group no longer lives in physical or social isolation but tries to advance itself, we have what Park dubbed the "marginal man," the individual who is part of two cultures and therefore not integrated into either. The members of the low status group seek to participate more actively in the social life of the people around them, and by acculturation and assimilation try to achieve recognition as equals of members of the dominant group. "Everything that marks them as strangers—manners, accent, habits of speech and thought—makes this struggle difficult." The phenomenon of self-hatred is an outcome of this struggle for acceptance and equality. "Children acquire the prevailing attitudes in the community by a kind of moral infection, but even adults are not immune, and there are moments when they are not wholly able to overcome that 'sickening sense of inferiority' which overtakes most of us at times; moments when they could say, what members of other racial minorities have sometimes said: 'I hate my race! I hate myself!'"

At the same time, Park sees the race problem as in part a problem of communication among different groups: "Whenever representatives of different races meet and discover in one another

—beneath the differences of race—sentiments, tastes, interests, and human qualities generally that they can understand and respect, racial barriers are undermined and eventually broken down. Personal relations and personal friendships are the greatest moral solvents." And in consequence, he looks for an ultimate improvement to result from the increasing tide of race competition and conflict in the United States. Today many Negroes are moving into business and professional occupations. And while this will initially lead to an intensification of tension and prejudice as the Negro occupational structure approaches that of the whites, bonds of similar interests will develop between Negroes and whites in the same position in the economic structure, and communication and understanding between members of the two groups becomes more likely.

Park sums up his view of the history of race relations in different societies in a simple formula: the relations of races appear to go through a cycle of racial competition, conflict, accommodation, and eventual assimilation.

IT is clear from this summary that Park had gone far beyond his chosen task of reporting society. He undertook the task of analyzing race relations throughout history, and in different parts of the contemporary world, in order to locate the sociological factors correlating with race prejudice.* And while the results we have summarized may seem in part obvious and not excessively striking, it is important to realize that in 1913, when the first of these essays was written, the conception of race and race relations held by many of the most advanced and sophisticated American thinkers was that expressed in the racist books of Madison Grant and Lothrop Stoddard—this was later to be brought into the realm of practical politics in the form of the American immigration regulations. Where the racists saw race prejudice as an "instinctive" reaction, where they saw the need to preserve the "purity" of race, Park saw the operation of the historical processes of conflict and accommodation as determined by social causes rather than

by anything so mysterious as inborn instinctual reactions. If the climate of opinion on the subject of race has changed in the past forty years in America, certainly a large part of the credit must go to the approach that was developed by Park and his students.

Park's work was, of course, not empirical or objective as these terms are used in modern sociology. Yet, to round out the picture, we should add that much of the work in the field of race relations in the 1920's and early 1930's that now forms one of the most imposing monuments of American empirical sociology, was a result of Park's encouragement to his students to study the background of different racial and ethnic groups. Many of the insights in the studies of men like Louis Wirth, W. I. Thomas, E. V. Stonequist, W. L. Warner, Allison Davis, Donald Pierson, and others, were the result of, explicitly or by indirection, Park's influence. And the more technical empirical sociology of the last fifteen years has time and again verified many of the hypotheses developed in his works.

For example, recent studies have tended to confirm Park's belief that racial prejudice breaks down when individuals work and live together in similar conditions in which they get to know one another as persons and not as stereotypes. Research in housing projects, army units, and the merchant marine, has shown that individuals "forced" to live and work with Negroes begin to drop many of their anti-Negro attitudes. (Thus, Stouffer *et al.* in *The American Soldier*, Volume I, Princeton, 1950, show that the closer the contact between white and Negro soldiers, the less the prejudice among the white soldiers.)

Park's denial of the rational liberal belief in education as the solution to race prejudice has also been validated by sociological and psychological research. It has been shown that anti-prejudice propaganda often activates, rather than weakens, the intolerant sentiments of prejudiced individuals. (This was demonstrated in the study by Eunice Cooper and Marie Jahoda, "The Evasions of Propaganda," *Journal of Psychology*, Volume 23, 1947.) As Park suggested, prejudice fills a real need of the bigoted individual and group and cannot be eliminated "rationally." The competitive social relations which create prejudice must be changed first.

The relation between economic mobility and race prejudice has also been confirmed in recent studies. In the last few years, research on race prejudice has begun to relate prejudice to the variable of personal social mobility, rather than

*His conclusions may seem similar to the common Marxist theory asserting that economic relations lie at the root of race prejudice, and indeed there is much in common between them. But we should remember that Park arrived at his conclusions on the basis of a wide experience and knowledge of race relations specifically, and that they did not follow from any general theory.

to the given socio-economic position of individuals; and it has been found that a person who is moving upward or downward socially, who is entering or leaving a given status level, is likely to be more prejudiced than a person whose social position is not changing. (This is demonstrated by the study reported in *The Dynamics of Prejudice*, by Bruno Bettelheim and Morris Janowitz, Harper, 1950.) One possible explanation for the great deal of working-class anti-Semitism in this country is the fact that American workers are oriented toward climbing up the socio-economic structure. Jean-Paul Sartre has suggested that European workers are less anti-Semitic than American workers because they do not have the American dream of leaving the working class.

WL. WARNER and his associates have developed the more optimistic side of Park's hypotheses about the relation of mobility to prejudice, especially as they relate to the changing position of the Negro in the United States. They have suggested that the "normalizing" of the Negro's economic position will eventually modify anti-Negro stereotypes. (Park's name, one may note, does not appear in Warner's extensive writings as the source of his "class-caste" hypothesis. Everyone agrees that knowledge in the social sciences should be cumulative, but too many social scientists continue to ignore much work which has already been done.)

The concept of the marginal man has also had numerous applications in sociology, psychology, and literature. Much of the current discussion of the "alienation" of minority group members is foreshadowed in Park's early generalizations on this theme.

One major problem suggested in Park's writings which has not yet been treated systematically is the relation between trading occupations as such and ethnic prejudice. It is obvious that there is some relationship. The stereotypes that were held of the Metics in ancient Greece, the Jews in Europe and America, the Armenians in the Near East, and the Chinese in the Orient, all suggest this. The fact that the hostile attitudes toward these minority groups were not solely a product of antagonism toward the alien can be seen in the pre-Civil War feelings about the "Yankee trader" in this country; in many respects, the stereotype of the shrewd, grasping, New England Yankee was similar to that of the Jew. The large-scale cooperative movements which exist today among farmers in the United States and Canada are also a result, in part at

least, of the great hostility felt toward "non-producers," the merchants who add to the price without adding to the product.

It is interesting to note, in this connection, that the prairie provinces of Canada—and perhaps those of the North Central United States too—are considerably more anti-Semitic than the country as a whole, in spite of the fact that there are few Jews in these areas. The province of Alberta, for example, is governed by the Social Credit party, many of whose leaders are openly anti-Semitic, while Coughlin received his greatest electoral support in North Dakota. These farm areas of the Wheat Belt have the largest rural cooperative movement in the world, and are politically against the middleman and the banks. Their anti-Semitism would then appear to be a result of identifying Jews with middlemen; attacking "the Jews," therefore, may often be another form of attacking the commercial and credit system.

Park's suggestion that societies prefer "aliens" in middlemen occupations, so they may be attacked more freely, and indeed the whole question of the nature and sources of anti-middleman attitudes, are worthy of further research.

THERE is one significant gap in Park's writings on race relations, and that is his inadequate treatment of Jews and anti-Semitism. This, however, does not seem to be due to any lack of interest on his part. Park himself did everything that he could to stimulate research on the Jews in the United States. On a number of occasions, he referred to the Jews as the most interesting ethnic group in the country, and even urged that the study of Jewish history be introduced into the public school system. That there is no significant sociology of the American Jew seems not to be a fault of Park's, but of Park's students, and of American sociologists of Jewish descent in general.

Why, one may wonder, did not any of them, except Louis Wirth, take up the Jew or anti-Semitism as a subject for investigation? It is possible that part of the answer may well lie in Park's theory of the effect of social mobility as applied to the Jew. Are not most Jewish sociologists "marginal men," seeking to escape the stigma of being Jewish by becoming part of the universal community of scholars? Might not they feel that studying the "Jewish problem" would doom them forever to an inferior status as "Jewish" Jews? This is all the more a pity because Park's theories seem particularly ap-

appropriate for the study of attitudes towards American Jews: their unique social mobility and rapid advancement would appear to have the effect, in line with his theories, of increasing social conflict and activating prejudice.

The major weakness in Park's writings on race relation lies perhaps in his assumption that they are subject to inevitable cycles. He believed that either assimilation on the one hand or a caste system on the other must eventually result from coexistence within one culture and state of different ethnic groups. The history of the Jews in the Diaspora is, however, as Park recognized, a significant exception to this generalization. Park never demonstrated that different cultural and racial groups, maintaining cultures that were separate to some degree, could not live in harmony and cooperation over very long periods of time. And indeed, by their very nature, hypotheses about the inevitability of cycles, whether they be cycles of race relations or of the rise and

fall of civilization, are not testable at all. Worse, they serve a negative function by suggesting that men cannot affect their own history.

There is, however, little need in this article to discuss those elements of Park's work which have not met the test of later investigations. It is more important to remind the new, more "empirical" crop of sociologists that all that was written before the invention of the IBM sorter is not useless. Robert Park was a keen analyst of society, who brought to bear on the problems in which he was interested the insights of European, especially German, social theory. One hopes that the republication of his writings will revive an interest in his work, both as a source of fruitful hypotheses for future research, and as a model of that kind of writing by social scientists which requires no other justification beyond that provided by its intrinsic intelligence and understanding, and the enlightenment it may offer to others.